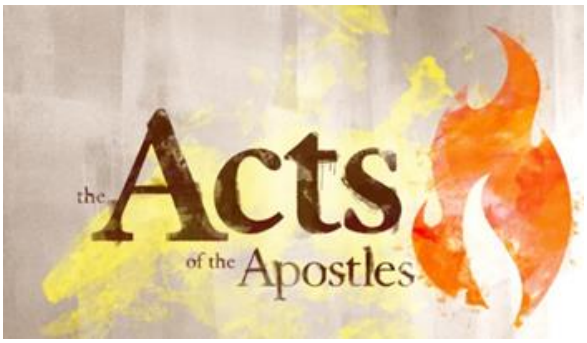
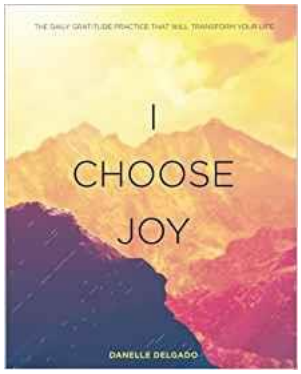
20181028 Acts 13 Pt3 Acts 13 Choosing Joy



"Acts of the Apostles: Acts 13 Pt 3: Lesson 23" by Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist Church ©2018

"Choosing Joy"



What we will find in the Word of God this morning is the concept of living in and experiencing pure joy regardless of our circumstances. I will share with you several principles that God gives us to live in joy and to live life abundantly. Many wonder what their purpose is in life and yet Jesus clearly told us. He said, *"10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10, NKJV).*

Last week you will remember we watched as Paul and Barnabas made their way across the island of Cyprus. There they had an encounter with the governor, Sergius, who had been under the control of a Jewish wizard named Bar-Jesus (who also went by the name of Elymas). We talked about how Elymas, as a Jew, knew of the mighty works of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, instead of leading Sergius in the righteous ways of the Lord, he chose to profit off of him by being a phony spiritual advisor employing fraud and deceit.

Paul recognized what Elymas was all about, and the text tells us that Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, called the wizard out as a "son of the devil" and spoke words which blinded the wizard and sent him stumbling and looking for someone to help him find his way. He had always been spiritually blind, and now God had covered him in physical blindness which made all the observers look on in wonder at the marvelous works of God. The passage tells us that Sergius himself saw these works and this powerful Roman became part of the family of God by being redeemed by the blood of the lamb.

Acts 13:13-27 then tells us that Paul and Barnabas left Pamphos, Cypress making

their way to the coast to what would be now be Antalya, Turkey. John-Mark made his way back to Jerusalem. His departure made Paul angry or disgusted and later in Acts Paul will talk about this incident. The two disciples then made there way up to Antioch in Psidia which should not be confused with the Antioch where Christ-Followers were first called "Christians." The road up to Antioch-Psidia was and is dangerous until today. It goes through rugged mountain passes with raging rivers coursing through the mountains. The path was and is today infested with robbers. No doubt some of the hardships Paul recounts that he has endured happened on this road to Antioch-Psidia.

The text tells us when they had reached Antioch-Psidia they made their way to the synagogue on Sabbath morning where, after having heard the Torah portion for the day, Paul was invited to get up and give a word of encouragement to the group there. Paul then set forth a beautiful, historical account of the Jews being delivered from bondage in Egypt to their establishment as a people first with Judges and then with kings, first of whom were Saul followed by David. Paul then introduced Jesus, who descended from the line of King David. He told the group of Jesus' mission, how He was true, how He was wrongfully accused, and how He was put on a cross to be raised from the dead.

"28 And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead. 31 He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:
'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" (Acts 13:28-33, NKJV).

Paul's presentation was thorough and complete. He left out no details concerning Jesus. In verses 42-52 we then see how the whole event in Antioch-Psidia included blessing and conflict. However, above all, the text tells us that "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit".

Blessing and Conflict at Antioch

"42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge

yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. [47] For so the Lord has commanded us:
'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' "
[48] Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.
[49] And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. [50] But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. [51] But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. [52] And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:42-52, NKJV).

Paul and Barnabas were faithful to the task that God had sent them out to do. Does this mean that they were successful in everyway? Well, on one hand yes, because they were doing exactly what God intended them to do. From a human perspective you could say that they weren't successful because not everyone believed, and some were out to get them. We can learn much about our own joy by this passage. Regardless of how their message was received, <u>they were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit</u>.

Life is a mixture of things going smoothly and things not going smoothly at all. A disciplined believer will learn to find joy in all circumstances, and a devoted Christian will seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let's take a look at these two things right now and see what we can take away to help us live a joyful life.

The world defines joy as "'a feeling of great pleasure and happiness,' but is that the extent of the meaning of the word "joy?" I think we all would rather have joy in our lives than depression and discouragement. Joy is something that we each want to have but many of us just don't quite know how to get it. The key to having joy and to understanding how to experience it is in realizing that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). So, the more our lives are surrendered to the will of God and to doing God's will in our lives, the more joy we will experience. Having joy is exactly what God wills for each of us.

All believers experience moments of joylessness. We find ourselves in the daily trials of life or in dire straights of illness or suffering, and if we forget that God is in control and that ultimately He desires for us to be conformed to the image of Jesus, we may lose hope. Job wished at one point that he had never been born (Job 3:11). David prayed to be taken to a place where he wouldn't have to deal with the realities of life. David cried out to the Lord saying, *"So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. [7] Indeed, I would wander far off, And remain in the wilderness. Selah. [8] I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." (Psalm 55:6-8, NKJV).* What David is saying is, "Lord get me outta here!" Remember

Elijah, after defeating the 450 prophets of Baal, became hopeless and fled to the desert, asking God to just take his life (1 Kings 19:3-5).

So if these Bible greats suffered moments of dejection and defeat, is there any hope for us? Let's look at a few steps that might help us fill our lives with joy instead of defeat.

1) Gratitude - Joy is a gift from God! The root word of joy in Greek is *chara*. This is a wonderful word. It happens to mean "friend" in Irish Gaelic (which I speak). It is reminder to me that God is with me and that He is my friend no matter which way events turn and no matter what comes at me in life. It is the word from which we get the word "grace." Joy comes when we begin to understand that God has given us undeserved favor. Joy is deeply rooted in gratitude. Grateful people are joyful people. Ungrateful people experience very little joy.

Some people are not grateful for anything. They think they're entitled to everything and they're mad when they don't get the things, people, or outcome that they think they deserve. My granddad had a bumper sticker on his car that said, "Growing old is not for sissies." Well, the older I get the more I agree with that bumper sticker. I could sit around and be discouraged because of the changes that I see going on in my own body, but instead I've chosen to thank God that He is taking me into a new season of my life.

Make a choice today to believe in the goodness of the Lord. Choose today to be grateful for His mercy and grace and to understand that you have SO MUCH to be grateful for.

2 Focus on the Positive - Having this gratefulness in mind, turn your focus on Him. Remember last week when we talked about those distractions that get us looking in the wrong direction? Don't look at them. When they pop into your head or your heart just say a quick prayer thanking God for something that is the opposite of that distraction. Don't focus and obsess over your difficulties or negative circumstances. Do your best and speak your heart to God. The Apostle Paul said, *"8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8, NKJV).*

I once heard another lawyer say, "I don't abide fools lightly." There is much wisdom in that statement. It means I just don't waste a lot of my time with foolish or negative people. I am a counselor. My job as a lawyer is to help people get the chaos out of their lives. One of my jobs as a pastor is to help people get the spiritual chaos out of their

lives. I have observed that some people just desire to stay in their chaos. They feast on the negatives in their lives instead of seeking to meditate on things that are of good report. Don't let yourself be drawn into the negativity and hopelessness of those who choose to dwell where there is no joy.

This doesn't mean that I don't acknowledge the difficulties and troubles that come into my own life and into the lives of those I counsel. Rather, it means I focus them and myself on the positive. What is the positive? God has this under control. If someone wants to jump over a cliff you usually can't stop them. When one of my closest friends chose to drink himself to death I learned that I cannot be someone's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3 Divine Perspective – To have joy does not mean giggling while the house burns down. To have joy in trials a believer must seek to have divine persepctive. That means to understand that we don't understand God's ways and God's means. We just can't see the whole picture of the human condition. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the vast disconnect between God's thinking and our thinking. *"8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.(Isaiah 55:8-9, NKJV).*

James, the brother of Jesus, said, *"2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." (James 1:2-5, NIV).*

I don't really know how to do all of this exactly, but it begins by confessing your hopelessness and helplessness to the Lord. It may involve praying something like this. "God, I am suffering. I am hurting. God, somehow give me joy in the midst of this suffering. God, I am doing all I can to eliminate this suffering and there is nothing else for me to do, so I surrender it to You and ask You for the grace to pass through this fire. Today God, I will choose joy. Fill me afresh with Your Holy Spirit. Lord, today I choose to praise You because You are all I have to hope in. Lord, in You and You alone is my fullness of joy."

Let us Pray!

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868.

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